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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001614

DEPT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, AF/C, DRL  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON  
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU  
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: DARFUR SECURITY UPDATE, OCTOBER 2008

Ref: A) Khartoum 1588

¶1. (SBU) Summary: With Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) making significant advances in North Darfur, UN security officers based in El Fasher report that humanitarian security has increased slightly in the last month despite last week's killing of a South African UNAMID soldier. There is currently no indication that Arab militias intend to overrun Kassab (an IDP camp 2 km from Kutum,) though UN and rebel contacts have reported significant movements of Arab militia throughout Darfur. End Summary.

SAF HOLDS ITS GAINS. . .

¶2. (SBU) Security officers from the El Fasher office of the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) met with poloff on October 30 to discuss recent changes in the security situation in North Darfur (names of UNDSS officers available via SIPRNET communications.) Successful SAF engagements with rebel forces in the last two months have solidified Sudanese control over a crescent-shaped swath of land stretching from Malha (170 km northeast of El Fasher) through El Fasher, and on to as far west as Kebkabiya (200 kilometers west of El Fasher.) UNDSS described the SAF as "determined to hold onto its gains." The SAF is currently rotating and refreshing their troops in place, in contrast to their 2007 strategy, which relied on Arab militias holding the ground. This resulted in the territory being later recaptured by rebels. These recent advances have pushed rebel movements further northwest, into more sparsely settled land closer to the border with Chad. UNDSS predicts that GoS forces will move Arab families into the areas in greater numbers to further consolidate their control. (Note: In telephone conversations with polasst, Suleiman Marajan of the Sudanese Liberation Army/Abdulwahid faction confirmed continuous SAF build-up and logistical support in these areas, particularly near Millet, 60 km northeast of El Fasher, and Malha. Abu Bakr Kadu of SLA/Unity also confirmed continuous SAF advances towards Dar Zaghawa, northwest of Kutum. End note)

. . . AND ACTUALLY IMPROVES HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

¶3. (SBU) Ironically, UNDSS notes that during October recent SAF advances in North Darfur contributed to increased humanitarian security there. As the criminal elements within rebel movements have moved further northwest into Dar Zaghawa, UNDSS has begun an outreach program to communicate better with local sheikhs and umdas, and to begin regular meetings within communities to further explain the role of UNDSS and humanitarian security workers. One UNDSS officer was skeptical of the "top-down" approach for creating humanitarian security through workshops with high-level rebels and government officials, as proposed by the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Development (reftel.) He noted that Darfur's rebel movements are too fractured and lack a central chain of command to offer any assistance. Instead, the officer added that sundry UN agencies in North Darfur have begun to communicate with each other

better in the last month regarding security issues, and this advance has also made a significant contribution to increased humanitarian security there.

#### OCTOBER 29 AMBUSH ON UNAMID

14. (SBU) UNDSS confirmed that a patrol of South African UNAMID peacekeepers was ambushed by unknown assailants on October 29 near Kassab (near Kutum, North Darfur,) killing one soldier and injuring two others. Three weeks ago, Kutum was the site of fighting between Arab militias over land surrounding the town. UNDSS believes this to be a localized, intentional act and part of a consistent pattern of low-level attacks to send the message that UNAMID's presence is not welcome. UNDSS officials were less concerned that Kassab IDP camp, 2 km outside of Kutum, was in danger.

#### REBEL AND SPLM COORDINATION

15. (SBU) UNDSS related that Suleiman Jamous, leader of SLA/Unity recently approached Khalil Ibrahim of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) to join another advance on Khartoum, but Ibrahim would only agree to the move if SLA/Unity fought under the banner of JEM. After an unsuccessful attempt at convincing his followers in SLA/Unity to accept JEM's offer, Jamous' movement effectively sidelined him, leaving him with no troops and no control over the movement he once headed. SLM/MM contacts earlier told poloffs of the ongoing power struggle between Unity leaders Suliman Jamous and Abdallah Yehia. These contacts stated that Jamous previously had more military influence on the ground than Yehia. (Comment: If UNDSS's account of Jamous's loss of power is accurate, this represents a major change within SLA/Unity. End comment). Due to

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this division and other problems within SLA/Unity, some Unity commanders have told Minnawi that they are ready to join his movement, according to SLM/MM sources. Minnawi has been hinting as much in his frequent phone calls with CDA Fernandez, mentioning Bahar Abu Garda and others.

16. (SBU) Despite its division, there has been significant coordination between SLM/Unity and other movements. JEM/Collective Leadership Commander Abdallah Banda (and former commander for Khalil Ibrahim) has been coordinating with SLM/Unity, according to SLM/MM sources. Abdulwahid's forces are also coordinating with Unity. SLA/AW contacts separately reported in October that there is a movement toward unification, and "we have strategic relations with many different movements." These SLA/AW contacts also reported that they are expanding their coordination with the SPLM, and have recently organized meetings in South Sudan, including two meetings in Wau and Juba during September. NCP officials have noticed such contacts and raised this issue with us in the past.

#### SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENTS OF ARAB MILITIA

17. (SBU) UNDSS sources, including senior military leadership, separately expressed concern about the massive buildup of Arab militia east of Muhajariyya throughout September and early October. One official speculated that this buildup may be directed against Minnawi's forces "in an attempt to build up their positions before things get worse." This individual said that some of the limited violence in October has been attributed to Arab militia attacking former SLM/MM commanders now unaligned with any movement. Separately, SLM/MM contacts acknowledged Arab militia activity, reporting that Arab militia (from the Ma'aliya tribe) ambushed SLA/Unity on October 8 killing an important commander. Although the fighting near Muhajariyya has been close to SLM/MM areas "formally, there has been no engagement between SLM/MM and the Arab Militia," said this contact. UNDSS sources also stated that they are concerned about the buildup of forces along the Chad-Sudan border, specifically noting the movement of GoS helicopters to the western border.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) The GoS's temporary provision of improved humanitarian access and security is positive. However, the concentration of rebel movements along the northwest border could also be a recipe for disaster, encouraging rebel military coordination, easing supply lines to Chad, and forcing the rebel movements to take drastic measures to regain lost territory. UNDSS predictions of Arab relocation to these newly acquired areas are also deeply troubling.

This and significant GoS troop and Arab militia deployment throughout Darfur signals that the government is not putting all of its faith in the peace process and upcoming negotiations. Although October was largely a quiet month by Darfur standards, the military option is still alive and well and, unfortunately, we expect increased military activity at the end of 2008 and start of 2009.

FERNANDEZ